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Monthly Message: FTP gives hope to survivors of sexual violence

Three simple yet powerful words ? we believe you ? are at the core of what the Lotus Centre at Family Transition Place (FTP) is about. Originally established with a grant from the provincial government, FTP's Lotus Centre continues to provide enhanced support to those who have experienced sexual violence, as well as to the family and friends who support these victims.

Working from the premise that sexual violence is ?never your fault,? the staff and counselling team at FTP provide a safe place for survivors to flourish and bloom. It is a symbol of strength, resilience and rebirth ? of beauty without blemish. At the Lotus Centre, healing is possible, and together, the dedicated team helps clients to discover their inherent strengths and acknowledge their own power.

FTP was granted new annualized funding in 2021 through the Ministry of the Attorney General for Sexual Assault Programming in Dufferin County to enhance its existing sexual violence services. In consultation with partner agencies ? Headwaters Healthcare Centre (HHC) and Dufferin Child and Family Services (DCAFS) ? FTP developed a model for this new centre to expand the collaborative services available in this community.

HHC provides important emergency medical attention for any victim of sexual violence, and a dedicated nurse collects important forensic evidence. DCAFS provides support and counselling for youth. FTP provides support and counselling for individuals aged 16 and older. The creation of the Lotus Centre allowed FTP to build on the existing services by providing enhanced mobile crisis response; counselling support to survivors, their family members and friends; peer support; and community outreach and education within schools and sports teams. This collaborative approach serves the community well, with each organization delivering services within this scope of practice and expertise.

All genders and identities are served at FTP's Lotus Centre by a team of dedicated experts committed to recognizing the trauma arising from sexual violence?for survivors and their loved ones needing support. Holding credentials in social work, counselling and psychology, and with many years of experience behind them, the Lotus Centre crisis intake team and counsellors use a variety of strategies, including trauma-focused therapy, to support survivors. Anyone can call directly for help through FTP's 24-hour support line (519-941-4357 or 1-800-265-9178). There is no referral required.

FTP's Counselling Supervisor, Lauren Babcock, comments, ?The work of healing trauma related to sexual violence has changed to now include providing support to partners, family members, or friends of someone who has been subjected to sexual violence. This is because the Lotus Centre recognizes the impact this can have on those supporting a survivor and it can be helpful and beneficial to have a space to learn more about the impacts of trauma, how to respond, and how to take care of themselves and survivors through positive coping.?

What is Sexual Violence?

How do you know if the shame, fear of violence or judgment, or any of the many feelings you might be experiencing are because of sexual violence? The answer is simple: ?If something didn't feel ?right,' then it probably wasn't.? Lauren explains, ?It's important to help clients understand and acknowledge that what they went through was indeed sexual violence and in no way their fault. Often, there are reasons why people dismiss or downplay their experiences, and it is helpful to explore that. Ultimately, we meet the clients where they are at.?

FTP is not the only agency to have replaced terms like ?sexual assault? with ?sexual violence? and ?victims? with ?survivors.? Empowered survivors who feel ?heard, understood and validated? no longer think of themselves as victims.

Sexual violence can be historic or recent, but at its core, sexual violence includes being subjected to an unwanted and non-consensual touch or sexual act, sexual abuse, sexual assault or rape, trafficking, stalking, sexual harassment or exploitation, or being exposed to language or behaviour or the non-consensual sharing of images. What matters most, however, is how you felt

about what was experienced. Lauren adds, ?We don't want to label people's experience, especially if they don't want it labelled. We want to help people work through how something has impacted them.?

Beyond counselling and support, the Lotus Centre has a second and equally important component to its work, and that is the important role that education plays in reducing sexual violence. Sexual Violence Community Engagement Facilitator Barbara Mason shares that education is an essential aspect of the work the Lotus Centre will undertake in the community: ?To be able to provide excellent support to survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones is a priority but, how do we stop the cycle? How do we target the root cause of the issue? How do we get to a point where we actually see a shift in culture that translates into a reduction of sexual violence in the communities we serve? Education is the key to prevention.?

Since the centre's inception, FTP has connected with hundreds of individuals through community agencies, youth, school boards, sports organizations and even area businesses to ensure everyone knows about the Lotus Centre, how it can help, and that eliminating sexual violence is the responsibility of us all.

Sparking a sustained cultural change might seem daunting, but if anyone is up to the challenge, it's the team behind the Lotus Centre at FTP. Here you will find a safe space, counsellors who understand trauma, who are ?respectful, gentle and kind,? and who will listen so that you feel ?heard, understood and validated.? Perhaps most importantly of all ? you will find people who believe you.

May is Sexual Violence Prevention Month (SVPM)

Alongside agencies across Canada, FTP aims to build important awareness of sexual violence throughout the month of May. Together with members of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC), FTP will raise awareness with community flag-raising ceremonies, proclamations, and other awareness initiatives throughout the month.

There are over 30 community-based sexual assault centres involved with the OCRCC. These centres provide crisis and counselling support to survivors of sexual violence in communities across Ontario.

Both the Town of Caledon and the Town of Orangeville have recognized this annual awareness-building initiative by proclaiming May as SVPM and raising a flag designed in partnership with the OCRCC by an Indigenous design firm. The County of Dufferin and several municipalities within the county have also proclaimed this important month, urging the thoughtful observance and recognition of SVPM by their residents.

According to Statistics Canada's 2025 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces ? the most comprehensive national data available, released March 2026 ? nearly 15 million people living in Canada, or 44 per cent of the population aged 15 and older, have been physically or sexually assaulted since the age of 15. This annual initiative provides an opportunity to highlight the importance of sexual violence support and centres. Critically, only 8.6 per cent of sexual assault victims reported the most serious incident they experienced to police ? a stark reminder that community-based supports remain essential.

Local resources, information, and SVPM updates continue to be published on FTP's website and the following social media pages throughout the remainder of the month.

Family Transition Place can be found on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads at @familytransitionplace, on LinkedIn at @family-transition-place, and online at www.familytransitionplace.ca

If you or someone you know needs support, compassionate staff are available to help 24/7. Call 1-800-265-9178. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.